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Montana Pupil Transportation News and Updates September/October 2002



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NATIONAL NEWS

NHTSA Sends School Bus Report to Congress Tuesday, May 7, 2002

Noting that school bus transportation is one of the safest forms of transportation in the United States, the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) today sent to Congress a new report assessing occupant protection in school buses.

Every year, the nation's 450,000 public school buses travel more than 4.3 billion miles to transport 23.5 million children to and from school and school-related activities, the agency said.

In comparison with other forms of transportation, the report shows that students are nearly eight times safer riding in a school bus than in cars. The fatality rate for school buses is 0.2 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) compared to 1.5 fatalities per 100 million VMT for cars.

This safety record is a result of the Department of Transportation's requirements for compartmentalization on large school buses, and lap belts plus compartmentalization on small school buses. Compartmentalization is the name for the protective envelope created by strong, closely spaced seats that have energy-absorbing high seat backs that protect occupants in the event of a crash.

The new NHTSA report concluded that requiring lap belts on large, new school buses would appear to have little, if any, benefit in reducing serious-to-fatal injuries in severe frontal crashes. In rare circumstances, tests indicate that in some severe frontal crashes there may be increased risk of serious neck injuries and possibly abdominal injury among young passengers wearing lap belts.

In small school buses, any increased risks associated with the use of lap belts are more than offset by preventing ejections. These buses weigh less, have different crash dynamics, and are more prone to rollover than large school buses.

The use of combination lap/shoulder belts, if used properly, could provide some benefit on both large and small school buses. Lap/shoulder belts can be misused if children put the shoulder portion behind them. NHTSA's testing showed that serious neck injury and perhaps abdominal injury could

result when lap/shoulder belts are misused. Assuming 100 percent usage and no misuse, lap/shoulder belts could save one life a year.

Lap/shoulder belts also could reduce school bus capacity by up to 17 percent because of seat redesign, and add between \$40 and \$50 per seating position to the cost of a new vehicle. The most popular buses carry between 60 and 71 passengers. The total annual cost would be over \$100 million.

Other considerations, such as increased capital costs, reduced seating capacities, and other unintended consequences associated with lap/shoulder belts could result in more children seeking alternative means of traveling to and from school. Given that school buses are the safest way to and from school, even the smallest reduction in the number of bus riders could result in more children being killed or injured when using alternative forms of transportation. In this context, NHTSA recommended that, if states and local school districts decide to require lap/shoulder belts on school buses, they should ensure that no passengers are forced to find alternate means of transportation.

Some states and local school districts have voluntarily installed lap belts in their large school buses. NHTSA continues to recommend that, if states or local school districts require seat belts on school buses, they should ensure that passengers wear them correctly. States and local school districts considering purchasing seat belts for large school buses should be aware of the results of this new NHTSA research report.

Over the past 11 years, school buses annually have averaged about 26,000 crashes resulting in 10 deaths - 25 percent were drivers; 75 percent were passengers. Frontal crashes account for about two passenger deaths each year.

Meanwhile, NHTSA is continuing its research program, focusing on side impact protection, working with university-based researchers to further study school bus crashworthiness.

The four-year research effort by NHTSA has pinpointed other improvements that could be made to improve the safety of school buses. The agency is considering the following changes to existing federal safety regulations:

- Increase seat back height from 20 inches to 24 inches to reduce the potential for passenger override in the event of a crash.
- Require buses under 10,000 pounds to have lap/shoulder restraints. Currently, passenger seats on these buses must be equipped with lap belts only. The agency also will consider seat redesign so the lap/shoulder belts fit correctly for all passengers aged six through adult.
- Develop standardized test procedures for voluntarily installed lap/shoulder belts.

A copy of the full report can be viewed on the agency web site:

<http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/departments/nrd-11/SchoolBus.html>

NHTSA Issues Interim Final Rule on Safety Vests

WASHINGTON, D.C. - On Oct. 22, 2002, NHTSA published its long-awaited interim final rule in the Federal Register amending Section 5.3.1 of FMVSS 213. The new standard amends NHTSA's current regulation governing the manufacture and sale of child restraint systems that attach to school bus seats and hold preschool and special needs children in place during a crash. Vests and other types of child restraint systems are currently prohibited by FMVSS 213 from having any means of attaching the restraint system to a vehicle seat back.

The agency stirred up a hornet's nest of controversy when it disclosed the contents of an interpretation letter it had issued during the summer of 2001. In the letter NHTSA wrote that child restraint systems for children under 50 lbs. cannot be attached directly to the seat back of a school bus. NHTSA was concerned that a vehicle seat back would not be able to withstand the additional load on it from an attached child seat in a crash. Child restraint systems attaching to vehicle seat backs are therefore the type of design that is intended to be prohibited by S5.3.1. of (FMVSS 213).

The new interim final regulation does not prohibit continued use of child restraint systems currently in use. Thousands of the devices are believed to be in service. However, the new regulation adds three key requirements. The first two requirements are: (1) the restraint system must only be used on school bus seats, and (2) the entire seat immediately behind the child wearing the seat-mounted vest must be either unoccupied or occupied by restrained passengers. NHTSA's intent with this second requirement is "to ensure that the seat back would not be overloaded and subject to failure." NHTSA's third requirement is that beginning on Feb. 1, 2003 these seat-mounted harnesses and vests must bear a warning label.

The warning label must read: "WARNING! This restraint must only be used on school bus seats. Entire seat directly behind must be unoccupied or have restrained occupants."

NHTSA said, "This interim final rule is premised on these conditions being met by way of a warning label on the vests, informing school administrators and school bus drivers about these conditions."

Unlike the more typical notice of proposed rulemaking, which is just that, a proposal, the new FMVSS 213 Child Restraints Systems' interim regulation is a final rule and is effective immediately. NHTSA is making the amendment final on an interim basis due to the pressing need to permit, early in the school year, the manufacture and sale of restraints that can be used to transport preschool and special needs children. That means it became effective the day it was published. For the interim final rule to become permanent, NHTSA must again publish it as a final rule in the Federal Register no later than Nov. 30, 2003. If NHTSA takes no further action by the day following, Dec. 1, 2003, the interim final rule will expire and cease to exist.

NHTSA now has three choices: (1) it can modify the interim final rule based on the comments it receives over the next 60 days, (2) it can leave the interim final rule as it is written and adopt it as the final rule, or (3) it can let the interim final rule expire at which point it ceases to exist, a non-action similar to a pocket veto that governors often exercise.

NHTSA is requesting public comments for 60-days about the proposal.

Separately from the school bus industry's interest in Section 5.3.1, NHTSA is upgrading FMVSS 213 pursuant to the TREAD Act. The objective of NHTSA's upgrade of FMVSS 213 is to provide increased safety for children positioned in child restraint systems and thereby reduce the number of children killed or injured in motor vehicles. For complete information go to: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/>

LOCAL NEWS

Driver In-service and Training Program

Is the new driver-training requirement an issue? A continuing education program for school bus drivers providing at least 10 hours of in-service training annually shall include but is not limited to training for: Pre- and post-trip inspections, passenger boarding and debarking procedures, driving skills, defensive driving, railroad safety, passenger management, safety and emergency procedures, and special needs sensitivity and awareness.

This training requirement applies to anyone that drives a school bus to and from school. There have been a lot of questions regarding the substitute drivers and how this requirement applies to them. Student safety is the reason for this requirement. All school bus drivers are required to receive the 10 hours of annual training.

The district board and administration should understand and implement pupil transportation laws, regulations and policies. They must plan and conduct pupil safety education programs as needed. They must maintain adequate records and work to promote school bus safety and efficiencies. This will include planning and conducting a school bus driver-training program.

There are many ways to insure that a district is in compliance with the new requirements.

The spring MAPT conference provides at least 10 hours of driver training in many and various ways. The conference fee is probably the best bang for the buck that anyone could receive for this training.

Other options include the videos contained in the OPI Driver Training Library. The videos usually last about 12 to 23 minutes. Time spent watching and discussing the videos will count towards the 10 hours of annual training requirement.

- 2 copies of *Evacuating a School Bus*
- 2 copies of *Bus Evacuation for Special Ed Bus Drivers*
- 2 copies of *Intervention Strategies for School Bus Drivers*
- 2 copies of *Intervention Strategies for Special Ed Bus Drivers*
- 2 copies of *Safe School Bus Crossing Procedures*
- 2 copies of *Introduction to Special Ed Bus Driving*
- 1 set (7 tapes) titled *Professional School Bus Driver*
 - 1. *The Professional Bus Driver and Student Safety*
 - 2. *Establishing a Positive Environment on Your Bus*
 - 3. *Dealing with Severe Disruptions*
 - 4. *Engaging the Support of the School Admin.*
 - 5. *The Role of the Bus Driver in Public Relations*
 - 6. *Establishing a Positive Attitude and Taking Care of Yourself*
 - 7. *Handling Students with Special Needs*
- 1 set (4 tapes) titled *Bus Discipline: A Positive Approach*
 - 1. *The Role of the Administrator*
 - 2. *The Role of the Driver*
 - 3. *The Role of the Teachers*
 - 4. *Solving Persistent Problems*
- 1 set (2 tapes) titled *Minnesota School Bus Drivers Development Series*
 - 1. *Winter and Adverse Conditions*
 - 2. *Student Management*
- 1 set (3 tapes) titled *Behind the Wheel, Precision Right and Left Turns for:*
 - 1. *Small Bus*
 - 2. *Conventional Bus*
 - 3. *Transit Bus*

The OPI video library also includes:

Necessary and Reasonable Force
Confidential Records
Children in Traffic
The Veteran Driver
The Safest Way Out

Other options include time spent renewing the first aid cards, driver training workshops planned cooperatively by schools throughout the state, the Advanced Driver Training classes provided in Lewistown. For more information call David Huff at (406) 444-4396 or Nancy Lunday at (406) 444-4432.

Documentation for all driver training should be kept in a driver-training file or in each driver personnel file as is appropriate for each school. Please do not send documentation to the OPI. We will review during school monitoring or auditors will review during school audits..

School bus transportation is an integral part of today's educational system. The school bus driver is expected to present a strong role model for children, as well as represent the school district before the public. When the driver is professional and knowledgeable, he/she will encourage social responsibility among the students. A quality driver-training program is critical to the success of a school transportation program.

OTHER NEWS

Yellow School Bus Tours Continue

The first scheduled trip to Lame Deer, Broadus, Miles City, and Roundup has been completed. Icy roads and plenty of deer make the trips more interesting. State Superintendent Linda McCulloch and her staff went to Valier & Browning on October 28-29. December 5-6 will find the group in Hamilton, Lone Rock, and Stevensville.

These trips allow OPI staff to visit schools and spend time with students, teachers and administrators. OPI staff has the opportunity to share what we do and ask teachers, administrators and students how we can better serve them. These trips are an excellent reminder to OPI staff regarding why we do what we do. It is great to be able to spend some time in the schools, visiting with the students and teachers.

David Huff and I are driving yellow school buses donated by Billings Truck Center in Billings, Harlow's Sales and Service in Three Forks, and Hartley's School Buses located at Treasure State Transit in Helena. On behalf of the State Superintendent and staff here at OPI, I would like to thank these three generous businesses for loaning the buses to us.

Student School Bus Safety Training at Townsend Public Schools

Buffy Woodring of B & L Transfer in Townsend invited me to attend the School Bus Safety Training that Townsend Public Schools provides for all students annually. I had no idea what to expect. When I met Buffy at school at 8:30, she had 2 yellow school buses parked out back. The plan was for each group of students to come out at the designated time, starting with the older kids and working our way to the kindergarten classes.

It was cold outside when the first group of high school students started loading into the bus. Inside, Buffy and her assistant Jackie took turns talking about issues that come up during an emergency evacuation. Buffy and Jackie loaded kids in the service door and evacuated them out the back. They talked with the kids about how to watch out for each other, how the big kids can help little kids, how all kids should respect each other, how to keep the bus clean and clutter free for safety purposes, how to help the parents avoid running the reds and other issues. We started at 8:30 and we finished up about 2:00.

Things moved pretty fast and I wondered just how much these kids would remember. When we got to the second graders, we found out. We did not make it clear where the students should go and what they should do once they had been evacuated from the bus. The first few kids out the back

door just clustered a few feet away from the bus. We evacuated a young man named Paul. He immediately began to help the students move away from the bus. We could hear him saying that they had to get far enough away that they couldn't read the license plate any more and they were supposed to stay together and stay in sight. Jackie and I were able to finish evacuating the rest of the kids without worry.

When we finished with the evacuation of Paul's class, we asked Paul how he knew what to do. He said he took the school bus safety class last year when he was in the first grade. He said it helps that he has a very good memory. We think that if it had been a real emergency, Paul's actions could certainly have saved lives.

It is wonderful to see Townsend Public Schools involving teachers, administration, bus drivers and other interested parties in educating students on school bus safety issues. Getting the students to school safely is a large component of the educational process. Townsend Public Schools has the right formula for success. Buffy Woodring makes it happen.

Transportation Person of the Year

Larry Revier was nominated and chosen by his peers to receive the coveted *Transportation Person of the Year* award for 2002 presented at the MAPT Conference in June. Larry owns and operates Revier Transportation with his wife Sandy. They have been transporting students in the Plains area for seven years. They own 13 buses and student safety is the top priority.

Larry mentioned that it is the kids and the people he works with that keep him happy and working hard. He enjoys working with the various committees and groups. Larry has been a board member of the Montana Association for Pupil Transportation for seven years, has worked on the Montana Pupil Transportation Advisory Committee for seven years and was a tremendous asset in the process of writing the new school bus construction and operations standards. Larry has attended National Association meetings, which allows him to provide valuable insight into how the Montana Association might conduct business.

Besides being "just plain crazy" as Hamilton Transportation Director Matt Schultz puts it, Larry is a dedicated and outspoken advocate for school bus safety. **Thanks, Larry, for a job well done.**

Revier Transportation



Since You Asked (Worth repeating)

What do I need to do when a driver certificate expires?

OPI will post periodic Driver Certificate reports on the transportation web site at www.opi.state.mt.us. Pick <Pupil Transportation> from the Programs and Services drop down menu. Districts will be able to identify updates that are needed before the certificate expires. Please notify the driver of the expiration date so he/she has time to update the requirement. Prior to the date of expiration, the driver will renew that portion of the certificate that is about to expire. The driver will notify the clerk or transportation director when he/she has renewed. The district personnel will complete the TR-35 (School Bus Driver Certificate), the board chair will sign it and give it to the clerk. Copies will be sent to OPI and the County Superintendent, a copy will be kept at the district and the original will be given to the driver. Encourage the driver to make certain that the dates are correct.

Where can I find:

1. Transportation Spreadsheet for budgeting purposes;
2. All new forms;
3. Calendar of scheduled events;
4. Supervisor/director survey & Directory;
5. Transportation Handbook;
6. School Bus Construction and Operations Standards;
7. List of training videos;
8. Transportation Newsletter; and
9. Any Hot New Items

Go to the new OPI Web Site at www.opi.state.mt.us. Choose <Pupil Transportation> from the Programs and Services drop down listing. Please call me at 444-3096 if you have any questions.

IMPORTANT DATES

October 1, 2001 Completed TR-1 for buses having only elementary riders due to County Superintendent from the district.

October 15, 2001 Completed and signed TR-1 for buses having only elementary riders due to OPI from the County Superintendent.

November 1, 2002 Farewell Bill Cooper

November 14, 2001 and four consecutive school days following - High School Bus Rider Count. Students must ride one morning during the 5-day period to be counted as eligible riders for bus reimbursement purposes. TR-1's and TR-2's can be found on the web. www.opi.state.mt.us <Programs & Services> then choose <Pupil Transportation>

December 1, 2001 high school bus rider count due to County Superintendent.

December 10, 2001 TR-1 for buses having any high school riders, due to OPI due to OPI.

Update driver certificates, bus inspection forms, route information and contracts regularly.

PROMPTLY RETURN TRAINING VIDEOS

